

**Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and The Origins of the American Revolution.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xix, 548. Appendices, maps, index**

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Volume 9, numéro 1, june 1980

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019356ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019356ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Daniels, B. C. (1980). Compte rendu de [Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and The Origins of the American Revolution.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xix, 548. Appendices, maps, index]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 9(1), 155–157. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019356ar>

1900, although his discussion of the impact of cheap workmen's train fares on the growth of lower class suburbs, with their combination of more space but also dreary design, is thoughtfully presented. But both Wohl and Jones prove conclusively that, more than any other issue, the housing crisis revealed the inability of classical economic theory to provide solutions to overcrowding and many other social problems. Unlike Wohl, however, Jones laments that the housing crisis was not alleviated through a rise in proletarian class-consciousness but only by the bureaucratic state and by the London Labour party "machine" of Herbert Morrison. Occasionally, Wohl reveals a lack of authority in traditional political history when he describes George Goschen, a very important Unionist cabinet minister (1886 to 1892 and 1895 to 1900), as having died in 1886. Wohl also is not completely accurate about, or fair to, Gladstone. Certainly he was not interested in housing legislation. But he was not indifferent to suffering. Driven by a mixture of evangelical zeal and Victorian sexual repression, Gladstone often prowled the streets of London's dangerous areas seeking to convince prostitutes to repent. Convinced of the truth of laissez-faire theory, he could only hope that the terrible urban conditions he saw would be alleviated through working class self-help fueled by Christian righteousness. Imprisoned by his ideology and relying so much on self-help, he was far too optimistic. Victorian urban history needs to be written with greater knowledge of Gladstone's political and moral beliefs. Similarly, in his references to Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree as social investigators, he could

have profitted from E.P. Hennock's important article on poverty and social theory.\* More serious is his failure, shared by Jones, to explore, or even to hint at, the possible links between the failure to proceed with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Housing and the Home Rule crisis. That crisis of 1886 produced a geological shift in British politics, diverting, arguably, energies from social reform into manoeuvrings to create and maintain new party alignments. Nevertheless, Wohl has written an important work which is essential to all serious students of Victorian Britain.

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Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and The Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xix, 548. Appendices, maps, index.

The Progressive interpretation of the American Revolution, thought to be near death during the hegemony of consensus historiography in the 1950s, recovered much of its health after resuscitation by the New Left in the 1960s. With American society torn apart by deep divisions over the poor, minority rights and the Vietnam imbroglio, a past based on a sense of shared values seemed sanguine to many historians and one

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\*See E.P. Hennock, "Poverty and Social Theory in England: The Experience, of the 1880s," *Social History*, Vol. 1 (1976), pp. 67-91.

based on economic, social and political antagonisms seemed realistic. Gary B. Nash helped revive the notion of conflict playing an important role in American development, and in his present analysis of economic and political life in the port cities of Boston, New York and Philadelphia in the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century, he gives it a mature statement.

Nash's organization of this complex topic is marvellously simple. After some introductory material, he has four sets of matched chapters, with the first chapter in each set probing the economic life of the three cities and the second one examining their political life and making a linkage between the economic super-structure and the political infrastructure. These four sets, arranged chronologically, bring him to the Revolution which is then placed in the context he has developed. He reaches three major conclusions. The first is that endemic warfare, overcrowding and the beginnings of a capitalist system, more responsible to the market mechanism than to the public good, led in varying degrees in each of the cities to a growing impoverishment of the lower classes and the emergence of a more visibly affluent upper class. He secondly concluded that the economic malaise experienced by the urban poor nurtured a resentment among them against the wealthy, enhanced their sense of class identity and increasingly brought them into the political arena. Finally he asserts that this anger, class consciousness and growing involvement with politics profoundly altered the origins of the Revolution. Nash is judicious. He realizes that urban poverty in

the colonies was not as debilitating as it was in England and Europe, that class theory was never fully articulated and much social deference survived and that the call for reform as part of an internal American Revolution was limited. Yet, despite this moderation, he is insistent on economic class as the major source of explanation of urban life and the Revolution.

Nash's economic analysis based on massive data drawn from probate and tax records, wages and prices and qualitative accounts is a major contribution but contains few surprises. Much of the recent literature on wealth accumulation stresses a growing maldistribution, and Kenneth Lockridge and others have shown that many parts of the countryside experienced economic problems as early America became overcrowded. His discussion of political events in the cities is equally sound, informed and researched. It is, however, in making the linkage between economic conditions and political action that Nash moves onto less secure ground and is frequently forced into deductive reasoning. For example, he argues that because Boston's artisans and mechanics were being squeezed economically and because they ran riot during the Stamp Act Crisis, they were acting out their economic frustration by venting it against the wealthy whom they perceived to be their oppressors. In this scenario of embryonic class warfare Nash thinks it patronizing to assume, as many historians have, that members of the Revolutionary elite such as Samuel Adams and James Otis directed the urban mobs. He may be right but he may not be; the evidence does not exist to make a definitive judgment, and one gets the impression that Nash is

operating on gut feeling. His account is logically plausible, but it is just as logically plausible to argue that sheer anger at British oppression motivated the mobs, and they vented their anger at the most visible symbols of British officialdom. After all, John Hancock, the wealthiest merchant in Boston but a patriot, did not have his mansion sacked. And, if the poor looked to Adams and Otis and other elites for leadership in town meetings and extra-legal committees, why should we assume they did not when they formed mobs? Nash's emphasis on economic conditions as the primary determinant of political action is further strained by the flipflop Philadelphia and Boston eventually made on the conservative/radical continuum. Philadelphia, the most prosperous of the three cities, was indeed the most conservative in the 1760s and Boston, the most impoverished, was indeed the most radical. But during the 1770s they exchanged positions and Philadelphia became demonstrably more radical than Boston. Nash argues that various circumstances, such as the presence of the British Army and religious homogeneity in Boston and the absence of the army and the presence of religious heterogeneity in Philadelphia, overcame the economic conditioning of political action. Yet, one is tempted to think that if these economic impulses could be so easily blunted they might not have been so basic.

Notwithstanding its lack of ability to be convincing on its central thesis, this book will no doubt assume a provocative and prominent place in urban and Revolutionary historiography. It is impossible to do its many subtleties justice in a short review, but it provides us with the

best economic history we have of the three northern cities, an informed account of their politics and a sophisticated statement of the class-conflict model of the Revolution. It is massively researched, beautifully written and intelligent throughout, but it will settle no major debates.

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Crew, David F. *Town in the Ruhr: A Social History of Bochum, 1860-1914*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii, 289. Tables, figures.

Urban history has frequently been written within a national historical tradition. David Crew's excellent monograph on industrializing Bochum illustrates the degree to which the questions specific to a national history can influence attempts to analyze social situations. In this case urban history is utilized to examine the uniqueness of German industrialization and its implication for the development of a Third Reich in Germany. Thus while the approach is social, the intention is political and historiographical. Exemplary is the introduction which suggests that the "critical school" of German history identified with Fritz Fischer and H.-U. Wehler sees Imperial Germany "as a society whose essential features were very much determined *from above*" (p.5). This, Crew thinks, provides little information on the "experience and activities of the great mass of the German people" and "contributes little to our